

# Fulfilling the Vision: North Beacon Hill Neighborhood Plan Update

## Draft Goals and Strategies

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### Vision: Excerpt from the North Beacon Hill Neighborhood Plan, March, 1999

*"North Beacon Hill is a community with a long and unique history, characterized by its ethnic and cultural diversity. The committee will work to develop a plan for a well defined urban village anchored by a new library and commercial/retail core accessed by efficient, pedestrian friendly, public transportation.*

*Furthermore, the urban village plan will reinforce existing single family neighborhoods by encouraging and focusing additional growth within the boundaries of the urban village while maintaining affordable housing alternatives throughout North Beacon Hill.*

*Finally, the committee's plan shall encourage the development and acquisition of additional public open space."*

### Shaping a Transit Oriented Town Center

This section of the update describes goals of community members to preserve the diversity of residents and merchants in the neighborhood while strengthening the core town center around the light rail station. It also outlines strategies and action to help achieve these goals.

The existing Beacon Hill town center already possesses many admirable characteristics. It has a neighborhood scaled commercial district and is a family oriented community that includes a light rail station, library, grocery store and variety of shops and services. Future planning initiatives should focus on strengthening the vitality of the retail, enhancing housing choices and improving pedestrian safety and comfort.

### Draft Goals and Strategies

**Goal:** Illustrate the desired future urban form of the town center in order to articulate how new development fits together and within the surrounding areas.

#### Discussion

The existing town center area is developed, but well below the amount allowed under current zoning, and in many instances not reflective of the desired future character of a more vibrant and diverse mix of shops, restaurants and housing. Additionally, the close proximity of single family and low-density multifamily areas means that there are limited opportunities for higher density development in the station area. The proposed urban design framework plan would identify desired pedestrian improvements and improvements to public spaces that could be incorporated as development occurs. The framework would also provide guidance on the relationship between buildings and areas, and how to provide a transition from new development to the less developed edges of the town center. The framework could potentially incorporate alley activation, the 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue reroute, and the Lander *Festival Street* (a street shared by people and cars) extension.

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### Draft Strategies

- A. Complete an urban design framework plan for the station area that could guide a development or rezones. Plan elements could include:
  - building height options;
  - incentive features;
  - open space; and
  - pedestrian connections.
- B. Amend the Beacon Hill Neighborhood Design Guidelines to more clearly articulate the goals of the urban design framework plan.

**Goal: Allow higher density development surrounding the station that is responsive to the neighborhood context at a variety of scales, from single family houses to multi storied buildings**

### Discussion

Community members stressed the importance of appropriate transitions from higher land use intensities to lower intensities, particularly adjacent to single family zoning.

### Draft Strategies

- A. Rezone key opportunity sites to encourage redevelopment of parcels around the light rail station in a manner that incorporates housing, commercial services (such as a grocery store and small businesses) and amenities.
- B. Where land use changes are considered, give particular attention to zone transitions.
- C. Evaluate water service / fire flow capacity requirements of higher density development under some zoning options, and develop measures to ensure flow needs are met. Evaluate potential need for area-specific sewer pipe infrastructure enhancements under zoning options that would increase development density.

**Goal: Guide the redevelopment of El Centro such that it builds on the site's history and serves as a defining civic element of the Town Center.**

### Discussion

Many community members acknowledged the importance of El Centro as a community resource and cornerstone. A strong desire was expressed to keep and expand many of the community services such as child care currently offered at El Centro. In exchange for the additional height sought by El Centro in their redevelopment, many community members expressed a desire to ensure the ground floor uses at El Centro contribute to a more lively pedestrian environment, through a variety of retail uses. A civic open space adjacent to El Centro, and an accessible public viewpoint were both mentioned as desirable public benefits to be included in the redevelopment. Many community members underlined the importance of providing a range of housing choices in terms of unit size and price.

### Draft Strategies

- A. Preserve the role of El Centro as a cultural center

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- B. Convene a three- way partnership between El Centro, the community, and the City to create a development plan for the site that guides future development. Elements could include:
  - Identification of the desired types of development along South Lander Street so as to augment the open space and create a larger civic area that is readily identifiable as an inviting community gathering space.
  - Incorporation of a publicly accessible view-space – such as a view tower – into the redevelopment of El Centro
  - Inclusion of affordable housing in the redevelopment of El Centro
  - Consideration of a “market arcade” along S. Lander St.
  - Preservation of the historic character of El Centro
- C. Change the land use and zoning to support the envisioned mixed use development on the site.

**Goal: Create a civic gathering space appropriate and flexible for the diversity of cultures living in the neighborhood**

### Discussion

Many community members expressed a desire for a gathering place that could accommodate specific cultural and interest groups. Given the diversity of cultures and ethnicities represented in the neighborhood, a common and flexible gathering place that can accommodate a variety of gatherings and activities is desirable and more achievable than a multitude of separate venues. While Seattle Parks and Recreation has significant experience with community centers and would be a valuable partner in considering ideas, a cultural gathering space could also result from the actions of non-profits, organizations and/or private developers.

### Draft Strategies

- A. Include in the urban design framework noted above design and development guidelines for a multicultural gathering venue (that may be privately developed).
- B. As funding becomes available, prioritize the acquisition of land for future development of a multicultural gathering space.
- C. Continue to develop neighborhood specific cultural programming and design elements in Seattle’s parks. Seek to print material in appropriate languages and have multilingual staff.
- D. Continue to provide access to the programs and resources provided by the Office of Arts and Cultural Affairs to plan and fund arts and cultural organizations, projects and events.

**Goal: Increase pedestrian and bicycle safety and vitality in the urban village**

### Discussion

Several community members proposed actions that would decrease the vehicular traffic on Beacon Avenue S in the town center and provide better environments for pedestrians.

### Draft Strategies

- A. Implement Southeast Transportation Study (SETS) which serves as the blueprint for programming transportation improvements in SE Seattle.

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- Project #4: Add a missing sidewalk link along Beacon Ave S at S McClellan St to provide a continuous sidewalk through the landscaped island
- Project #6: Improve safety at the intersection of Beacon Ave S and S Stevens St.
- B. Use the Pedestrian Master Plan as a tool for prioritizing pedestrian improvements.
- C. Use the *Bicycle Master Plan* to prioritize and improve bicycle connections to downtown, Jefferson Park and Rainier Valley.
- D. Complete a conceptual design for Beacon Ave. S from the town center to S Spokane St., working within the existing right-of-way that shows a possible new cross-section. Consider extending the median north along Beacon Ave S, planting street trees, providing opportunities for café seating, and other features such as bike lanes, street furniture, pedestrian lighting. This design will work within the existing right-of-way. (Note: An operational analysis of any proposed street design changes is necessary to assess impacts upon levels of congestion, especially at intersections, and parking impacts. Both existing and future conditions will need to be studied. Currently there is no funding for analysis, engineering or construction.)
- E. Provide benches at regular intervals along streets in the station areas, at bus stops and along major walking routes (e.g. Beacon Avenue).
- F. Explore the option of a traffic reroute that would redirect through-traffic off Beacon Avenue S in the commercial center.
  - This strategy calls for the rerouting of through-traffic from Beacon Ave. S to 15th Ave. S at S McClellan St. and back to Beacon Ave. S at the 15<sup>th</sup> Ave. S intersection. By reducing traffic on Beacon Ave., the Beacon Ave. streetscape would be made more appealing for pedestrians and bicyclists and still be able to adequately accommodate transit. A "traffic-calmed" Beacon Ave. S would most likely promote further streetscape improvements. (Note: The re-routing strategy would require a more detailed modeling and operational analysis to understand the traffic volumes that would be diverted, effects upon congestion especially at intersections, geometric requirements, and the possible need to acquire additional right-of-way. Both existing and future conditions would need to be studied before any decision were made about this alternative. Currently, there is no funding for such an analysis, engineering, design, or construction.)
- G. Consider transforming existing alleys into a pedestrian network that would link key civic destinations with the surrounding residential area.

### Creating Choices for Living, Working and Play

This section of the update describes goals of community members to preserve, enhance and improve the day to day life of residents and merchants in the North Beacon community. It also outlines strategies and actions to help achieve these goals.

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This community values and wants to build on the following unique characteristics: its location close to downtown with its commercial district on the ridge; its neighborhood-scaled commercial district with goods and services reflecting the diverse ethnic and cultural population; its beautiful parks and open spaces; and a family-oriented community inclusive of a broad range of incomes, cultures, and family sizes. The following Goals and Strategies are intended to strengthen these unique characteristics.

### Draft Goals & Strategies

**Goal: Provide affordable and diverse housing options throughout the neighborhood.**

#### Discussion

Community members are interested in promoting options that work for a community that is economically and ethnically diverse. Rising housing prices are making it difficult for families to remain in their homes and many in the community have larger, extended families in need of larger homes. Of concern is the fact that new construction is often expensive and/or doesn't meet the needs of larger families.

#### Draft Strategies

- A. Allow alternative housing types, such as cottage housing, in single family zones that support affordable choices while preserving the single family character.
- B. Encourage and require a mix of unit prices and sizes through active use of incentive, direct City funding, and surplus property programs.
- C. Encourage affordable family sized homes through incentive, direct City funding, and surplus property programs; in particular, strive to preserve, or when needed, replace affordable family-sized apartments in existing multi-family buildings.
- D. Use City funding to leverage other funding to preserve existing and create new subsidized housing.
- E. Apply Comprehensive Plan affordable housing targets to the Beacon Hill Urban Village and periodically evaluate progress; set affordable housing objectives and use incentive, direct City funding, and surplus property programs to fill gaps.
- F. Achieve a balance of affordable rental and homeownership housing through incentive, direct City funding, and surplus property programs.
- G. Provide support to low income homeowners with weatherization and rehab assistance and property tax exemption.

**Goal: Encourage the development of more housing close to the light rail station.**

#### Discussion

A number of comments about light rail also included concern that housing will become unaffordable around the stations and negatively impact populations that rely more on public transportation.

#### Draft Strategies

- A. Capture the opportunity created by light rail to fund new affordable housing development close to the new light rail station by including homes appropriate for different family sizes,

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- so that residents are able to stay in the community, even in the face of real estate escalation and new market rate development.
- B. Leverage public funding to support affordable housing adjacent to light rail station.
- C. Prioritize the provision of affordable workforce housing if incentive zoning is used in the Station Area Overlay District

**Goal: Foster and support a commercial district that is home to a grocery store and a mix of small, local and ethnic businesses**

### Discussion

The existing commercial district is neighborhood based and largely comprised of small, local, immigrant and refugee-owned businesses. While the arrival of light rail service presents an opportunity to increase the customer base of these businesses, concern was expressed about the potential for commercial rents to increase around the station, and thus negatively impact the small, ethnic businesses that are a positive and defining characteristic of the neighborhood.

### Draft Strategies

- A. Strengthen the North Beacon Hill business association so that the business owners work together and with the community to create a neighborhood business district that serves the community. The business association can also provide a venue for its members to raise its concerns to the City as well as pursue grants and technical assistance.
- B. Support the existing mix of small businesses and encourage new small businesses by providing technical assistance to small businesses, and by providing access to financing for small businesses.
- C. Support potential partners that might include:
  - SCORE/Small Business Dev. Center
  - Community Capital Development
  - Beacon Business/Property Owner Organization
- D. Explore strategies to support long-term affordable commercial space including new and existing models of financing mixed use development projects that provide affordable commercial space as well as affordable housing in City-funded mixed use buildings
- E. Retain local access to food, including a grocery store in the commercial core.
- F. Promote childcare close to station.
- G. Maintain the remainder of parcels and store fronts north and south of the immediate station area along Beacon Avenue S. for new and small businesses.
- H. Improve the business district to make it more inviting using the Neighborhood Business District Grant Award Program. Improvements may include:
  - Streetscape amenities, such as benches and bannersPotential Partners
  - Office of Economic Development
  - Beacon Business/Property Owner Organization
- I. Work with the King County Public Health Food and Facilities program to promote on-street food vending.

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**Goal:** Create, program and maintain a range of parks and open spaces in the urban village core that accommodate a variety of uses and diversity of users

### Discussion

Many community members indicated the diversity of the neighborhood as one of the most important characteristics of the neighborhood. In continued support of this diversity, it was suggested that parks and open space be designed and programmed to accommodate users of diverse ages, interests and cultures. Much of the open space is owned and developed by Seattle Parks and Recreation, but there are other opportunities in the street rights-of-ways (ROW), at the light rail station and as part of private development

### Draft Strategies

- A. Work with El Centro to create a civic gathering space at El Centro
- B. Work with El Centro to maintain and improve the children's play area at El Centro.
- C. Improve and maintain Jose Rizal Park and establish pedestrian and bicycle connections from the village center to the park.
- D. Implement the Parks and Green Spaces Levy project to renovate and improve Beacon Hill Playground.
- E. Per the Parks and Green Spaces Levy, continue further development of Jefferson Park Master Plan and the construction of a skate park.
- F. As funding becomes available create additional children's structured and unstructured play areas in the urban village.
- G. Seek to create small pocket parks spread throughout the urban village, either through City acquisition or private development,.
- H. Work with Seattle Public Schools to develop a park/playground ay Beacon Hill Elementary.
- I. Sponsor activities and events so that people can get to know each other and their many cultures.
- J. Improve greenbelts by removing invasive vegetation, protecting from encroachment and adding or maintaining trails.